

Our Hearts Are In The Highlands **A Personalized Travelogue**

By C.K. Garabed

Our son and daughter, who have been to Armenia and Karabagh many times, have constantly urged my wife and me to visit the homeland. My reply has always been “When you take us, we’ll go.”

Well, a few months ago, our son approached me again on the subject, except, this time he had a concrete proposal. It seems the Armenian Cultural Association out of Watertown, Massachusetts had organized an Armenian Heritage Tour of Armenia and Karabagh. “I will not be a member of the tour,” he said, “but if you go, I’ll see you there as I have business to take care of in both Armenia and Karabagh, so I’ll be able to spend some time with you.” Without hesitation, and without consulting my wife (always dangerous), I immediately gave him the O.K. On the spot, he called Bedros Bandazian of Richmond, Virginia and secured us a place on the tour. It turned out to be one of the best snap decisions I ever made.

If a non-Armenian visits Armenia for the first time and writes about it, one can pretty well imagine how the trip would be described. After all, Armenia is one vast museum, both natural and man-made. And he might be tempted to ask, “If Armenia has such a glorious past, why isn’t it better represented in history books or better known? I have an answer for that. The European historians perceived that Armenia was located in Asia Minor, as the area was known, and steered clear of it. The Asian historians, who are smarter than their European counterparts, knew that the Armenians are a European people, and for that reason passed over them. So, Armenia fell through the historical cracks. But what would you expect to read if an Armenian visits Armenia for the first time and writes about it? Well, the following will be an attempt to address that very matter, but from a highly personal perspective.

I was not born in Armenia, but I like to think that Armenia was born in me. So, any description of a first trip to Armenia would of necessity be from the perspective of a homecoming of sorts, even though the Armenia of today does not resemble the Armenia of the past.

There we were, 82 of us. Many knew each other; others were becoming acquainted for the first time. What had brought us together? For the most part, we were Armenians from America who had a desire to visit, not the Armenia of our forebears, but the only Armenia that exists today. This 15 day tour, organized by the ACAA, was a continuing experiment. The ACAA had already achieved great success with its Annual Armenian Heritage Cruises to the Caribbean, and now, for the first time, was trying its hand at a full-fledged tour to Armenia.

It was a fairly diverse group. Travelers hailed from California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Texas, Virginia, and even Canada.

Backgrounds differed as well, economically, educationally, politically, religiously (church affiliation), and linguistically. Many were visiting Armenia for the first time, some had been there before. A few “odar” spouses, no less enthusiastic about the trip, added to the diversity.

I suppose most of the travelers could be classed as senior citizens, but we did have some young persons on the tour. Raffi Manoukian, son of Armen & Natalie, and grandson of Sam Hagopian, Taleen Tikoyan, daughter of Thomas & Nevarte, Vahak Yeghoyan, son of Garo & Azniv. and Robert & Meline MacCurdy, grandchildren of Arpena Mesrobian, whom you may remember as the author of *Like One Family: The Armenians of Syracuse*.

The ACAA had engaged the services of TravelGroup International whose director, Faye Weissblum, accompanied and guided the group which started from various points in the U.S.A. (She has promoted the Annual Armenian Heritage Cruise to the Caribbean from 900 passengers last year to 1600 passengers signed on for the next cruise, the seventh, scheduled for Jan. 18, 2004.) MENUA Tours was selected as the local operator in Armenia.

Our carrier was Austrian Airlines, which took us first to Vienna. During a layover there without an overnight stay, we were given a bus tour of the city, as well as being taken to the Mekhitarist Religious Center, Library and Museum. Our guide was a pretty young lady whose name was Gabriella Schaffetter Steiner. Her speech reminded my wife of her Swiss friend, Heidi Brunold. Questioning Gabriella about her background revealed that she was originally from Switzerland. From Vienna, Austrian Airlines took us directly to Yerevan.

Leaving the Airport in Vienna and arriving at the airport in Yerevan was a prime example of culture shock. The Austrian airport, clean, bright and architecturally pleasing stood in sharp contrast to the dark, dingy, cramped airport in Yerevan. I instantly redubbed Zvartnots (joyful place), the name of the airport, as *Varnots* (inferior, poor quality.) The rumor is that a wealthy Armenian from South America is putting up the money to modernize the airport. (Orerut shadnah!/May your days be lengthened!)

For most of our stay we lived at the Hotel Armenia. The front of the hotel was undergoing refurbishing, but the rear, known as the Ararat Wing was perfectly modern with ample rooms that were more like suites, and which possessed all the desirable conveniences. One drawback is the narrowness of the elevators, which appear to be European style. The food served during breakfast left nothing to be desired. Preserved and fresh fruits of all kinds, juices, eggs cooked to order, bacon, potatoes, oatmeal, a sort of pancake with grape molasses, and plenty of bottled water, all served buffet style, started us off in a grand manner each morning. Sometimes we stopped for lunch on our travels by bus, and evening meals were usually taken at a restaurant that featured

entertainment. The musicians of Armenia must have served apprenticeships with Armenian-American musicians, as the amplified volume of sound they produced would warm the hearts of hearing aid dispensers.

With the loss of time traveling eastward, we had already spent two days, and on the third day, Friday, October 3, with the accommodations of two modern buses that had been arranged for because of our numbers, and with the excellent guides Aram Alaverdyan and Hripsime Badalyan, and very capable bus drivers Marlen Petrossyan and Vardan Pahlevanyan provided by MENUA Tours, we were given a tour of the city of Yerevan, which was founded in 782 B.C., 32 years before the founding of Rome. The Encyclopaedia Britannica states that, according to the tradition of Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Rome was founded by Romulus about 750 B.C.

Included in our tour was a visit to the Erebuni Museum with its hundreds of artifacts from Erebuni, Karmir Blur and Armavir, the three principal Urartian cities in the Ararat valley. This small two story museum is located on the western slope of the Erebuni elevation, where hundreds of artifacts were dug out during the excavations in 1950. Visible are the remains of the Erebuni fortress built by Argishti I, son of one of the most powerful kings of the Urartu kingdom, Menua. A polished basalt stone excavated in 1952 contains a cuneiform inscription composed of 13 lines which begin, "I, Argishti I, son of Menua . . .". Incidentally, our tour operator in Armenia, MENUA Tours, is named after this king.

This was followed by a visit to the Matenadaran, the Research Institute of Armenia which houses beautiful illuminated manuscripts created centuries ago by scribes. The Matenadaran is named after Mesrob Mashtots, founder of the Armenian alphabet. Over 10,000 manuscripts detailing history, philosophy, medicine and geography written in Armenian, Greek, Arabic and other languages are preserved here.

We were taken next to the Tsitsernagaberd Monument and Museum. This monument commemorates the 1915 Genocide. It was built around 1965. The monument and its eternal flame are pilgrimage sites for Armenians all around the world. Members of our party placed flowers around the edges of the opening of the eternal flame and under Der Diran Papazian's leadership prayed for the souls of the martyrs. It was a very solemn moment. Afterwards, we returned to the Hotel Armenia where we had our dinner.

Despite the fact that we spent an inordinate amount of time on the buses (which couldn't be helped) traveling to all the sites on the tour, we on Bus No.1, when our guide, Aram wasn't describing places and events, entertained ourselves with singing Armenian folk and national songs, telling stories and humorous tales, especially those of Nasreddin Khoja, and thereby getting to know each other better.

Although bus No. 2 undoubtedly had its share of talent in the persons of Bedros Bandazian, Vasken Aivazian and Zohrab Tazian, we sure had a lot of live wires on bus No.1.

From New Jersey came my cousin Anahid Dadoyan and her two daughters, Hourig Darakjian and Sossie Dadoyan Arlia. A third daughter, Arpie, was, unfortunately, not free to travel, else we would have been regaled with even more first class entertainment. You see, Arpie has been touring cities in the U.S. performing her one-woman show IPENKIM. By the way, the Dadoyan family tree extends all the way back to Tad Dadoyan who was originally from Karabagh.

There were:

Sam (Sahag) Hagopian from Texas.

Maro Asatoorian from Maryland, who constantly entertained us on the bus with her singing of Armenian folk songs.

Antranig and Marion Boudakian from New York

Bedros and Siran Der Bedrosian from Florida. Bedros is a professional photographer whose talents will prove beneficial to us all, despite our cameras.

Georgi-Ann Oshagan from Michigan, and her mother, Pearl Bargamian from Rhode Island. Georgi-Ann, who is the wife of Haig Oshagan, editor of The Armenian Review, is the mother of two children in their teens, which is hard to believe, as she herself looks like little more than a teenager herself. But don't let that fool you. She is the Chairwoman of the ARS Eastern USA.

Also from Michigan came Barbara Haroutunian who was the life of the party, telling jokes, as well as interesting stories, and generally making her strong personality felt at every turn. There is something very interesting in her background that should not go unnoted. Back in 1970, and for the next eight years, the Mother See in cooperation with the Eastern and Western Dioceses of the U.S. established a program to send about 25 Armenian students to Armenia for one month. Its purpose was to instill in them, by means of an intensive program, all aspects of Armenian culture. 80% of the trip's expenses were paid for by the Mother See and Armenians of the Diaspora. Barbara was one of the students, all members of the ACYOA, given this opportunity. These young people were housed in the Hotel Armenia, as those in charge of the program knew that they were used to the best accommodations. Each day, after breakfast, they would walk to a nearby school where they would be subjected to three hours of conversational Armenian, and Western Armenian, at that, as they didn't want to waste time teaching them Eastern Armenian. Then they would have one hour of Armenian dance lessons from a retired dance teacher. Following lunch back at the hotel, they would be taken on tours. At night they would attend the opera or other cultural events, and sometimes be addressed by notable artists, such as Sylva Gaboudikian, Barouyr Sevag, Ophelia Hambartsumian, and Martiros Sarian, to name a few. In Barbara's estimation the program must have worked because most persons who participated in this program married fellow Armenians, and became highly involved in Armenian community affairs.

Finally there were Der Diran Papazian and Yeretsgin Rosalie from Michigan who were a source of brightness and good fellowship, not to mention the practical side of having every meal blessed by Der Hayr. I consider it my good fortune to have had the opportunity to become progressively better acquainted with Der Hayr and Yeretsgin mainly because of the many interesting things we talked about, not just chit chat. Our conversations ranged from folklore to religion to philology to music to history, all

Armenian oriented. I was to learn that Yeretsgin was the sister of the noted educator and scholar, Dennis Papazian. She narrated for us, over dinner, how her family name of Papazian came about, and the fact that when she married she didn't have to change her name.

It seems that her father immigrated to the U.S. under the assumed surname of Pappas, because he came to this country with his Greek friends to escape service in the Turkish army. His real name was Nahabet Dzerounian. Her father returned to Istanbul in 1920 to marry her mother who was 17 years old at the time. Her mother learned Greek and English when she settled in the Greek community in Augusta, Georgia. Although she loved the Greek people for their acceptance of her family, she longed for her Armenian Church, and never let the children forget that they were Armenian.

When Greek women began to question her about her intentions for Rosalie's sister, Priscilla, in regard to a suitable husband, she packed up the family, bag and baggage, and moved to Detroit, Michigan, as there were relatives living in nearby Pontiac. She planned to change the family name back to Dzerounian, but Rosalie, with her sister, Priscilla, and two brothers, Dennis and Chris pleaded with her to Armenianize Pappas, the name they were bearing, instead of Dzerounian, a name that nobody else knew. She concurred and the name Papazian was legalized.

She also informed us of Der Diran's background which we found to be quite impressive. For the sake of brevity the following is presented in condensed form:

Born in Constantinople in 1923 as Garabed Papazian, he was admitted at an early age to the Jerusalem Theological Seminary as a student. After graduating from the seminary in 1940, he lived in Palestine until 1948. He taught at the Armenian school in Haifa, and worked with the British army as a civilian employee, while also doing various other jobs.

After Israel declared independence in 1948, he moved to Beirut, Lebanon where he taught at an Armenian school.. He was admitted to the Theological Seminary of Antelias as a special student. The seminary assigned him to teach a newly opened class for married priests, and also to teach religion at the AGBU high school for boys.

He came to the United States on a student's visa in 1951 to pursue higher theological studies. He was granted bachelor and master's degrees in Divinity and Theology from the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, MA (1955), and Harvard University (1956), while attending the Boston Conservatory of Music for voice training. At the ACYOA Convention in Washington, D.C., he met Rosalie Papazian whom he later married in 1957. He was ordained a priest and renamed Der Diran in 1958.

For the next few years he served as pastor and visiting pastor of various churches in the midwest. In 1961, while leading a group of pilgrims to Armenia he had the distinction of celebrating Badarak and delivering the sermon in the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin in the presence of Vehapar Vasken I. His Holiness expressed his appreciation to Der Diran with the gift of a jewel-studded hand cross.

He was granted the Pectoral Cross with a special Gontag by His Holiness Vasken I in 1966, and again, in 1983, on the 25th Anniversary of his ordination, given a second special Gontag by His Holiness and elevated to the rank of Archpriest.

He retired in 1995 after a lifetime of dedicated service to his church and people. But he has not been permitted to rest, because his services are in demand, and so he has been serving various parishes of the Eastern and Canadian Dioceses. Worthy of note is his authorship of the Sunday School Anthem officially adopted by the Cilician See in 1949 as the result of a nationwide contest which he won.

I do not hesitate to criticize our church fathers for adhering to a useless and self-serving tradition, which has no basis in Scripture, and that is the practice of elevating to the hierarchy of the church only celibate priests. Contrast our practice with that of the Jews. They encourage their best minds to become rabbis and beget large families, which the community is prepared to support. They thus enlarge the desirable genetic pool, which redounds to the benefit of the community. But what do we Armenians do? We insist that our best minds beget no children, thus cutting off what should be considered the desirable gene pool. If the regulations of our church were changed to permit married priests to graduate to the highest levels of the church, how much better off we'd be as a forward looking people, and how wonderful it would be to see men of the caliber of Der Diran placed in responsible positions within the church hierarchy.

Some people need credentials to be impressive, but the true man is impressive by virtue of his personality and character. Not that Der Diran doesn't possess impressive credentials, as noted above. But the depths of his knowledge imparted almost casually and without fanfare, is the mark of the well-rounded scholar. In other words, even without his higher education, Der Diran would have been Der Diran, for, like Abraham Lincoln before him, he would have looked after his own education, and, like Mark Twain, have said, "I never let my schooling interfere with my education."

At breakfast the following morning, who should we meet in the dining room, but our good friends from back home, Haig and Mary Sarajian, who had come to Armenia on another tour and were getting ready to return home the following day. Mary, who has worked as a travel agent, on and off, for many years, is the one I consulted about the virtues of travel insurance, mainly medical. When I told her we were too late to get the trip cancellation feature concerning carrier failure, she commented that as we were flying via Austrian Airlines there was little likelihood of that. (I'll have more to say about this later.)

Following breakfast at the hotel Saturday, October 4, we set out by bus to visit Geghard and Garni. The ancient monastery of Geghard was carved out of solid rock. In ancient times this monastery was known as "the monastery of the seven churches", "the monastery of the forty altars" or Ayrvank (the monastery of the cave), confirming the presence of ancient caves dug into the rock. Geghardavank is the monastery of the spear. This last name derives from the relics, for many years conserved in the monastery and

now in Edjmiatsin's museum, of the spear that was said to have wounded the chest of Christ on the cross. The exact date of Geghard's foundation is not known, but according to the inscriptions found locally dating from the 7th and 8th centuries, it is likely that it dates back to the early times when Christianity was recognized and declared the official state religion. The main church dates back to 1215. Inside the church's interior exists a natural spring, anciently worshipped and today carefully preserved.

We returned to Yerevan and had some time to look around before going to dinner. Our daughter had given us a copy of her book on Armenia to give, with her compliments, to a friend in Yerevan. She told us we could find his Arts & Crafts shop on Abovian Street. The first time we looked for it we couldn't find it. However, after inquiring of one of the musicians who greeted us at one of our stops on the road, we were able to locate it. When we walked in, Jerair, our quarry saw us before we saw him, and with a big smile and hug greeted us like long-lost relatives. We had already befriended him in the states previously. Jerair Avanian was a Hayasdantsi who had spent a great deal of time in the U.S. It was during the time when he operated two small art galleries in the lower East Side of Manhattan, where our daughter worked as his curator, that we came to know him. That was quite some time ago, and we had not seen him since. In addition to his shop, he also owns a restaurant by the name of Dolmama, and true to its name specializes in serving dolma. In addition to the book we had other goodies for him: Nvair Beylerian's latest CD for children, Donadzar, and Armen Babamian's latest CD converted from a previous pressing of Armenian religious and folk music. He in turn gave us a handcrafted doll with angel wings to give our daughter on our return. I informed Jerair to be ready for us when we got the opportunity to dine at his restaurant. He assured us that we would not be disappointed. Incidentally, Abovian Street is undergoing significant improvement. Even on Sundays, jackhammers are tearing up the street, and new pipes are being installed as well as beautiful granite curbstones. New sidewalks will be sure to follow, and Abovian Street will be a pleasure to traverse instead of being an obstacle course.

That night we had dinner at the Golden Fork Restaurant in Yerevan with live Armenian dance music. It turned out to be a lively evening, with toasts, short speeches, singing of Armenian national and folk songs, and vigorous dancing. Conspicuous in these activities were Vasken Aivazian from Illinois, Zohrab Tazian from Indiana, Antranig Boudakian from New York, and Bedros Bandazian from Virginia. My wife and I made it a practice, whenever possible, to sit with Der Diran and Yeretsgin Rosalie during our meals. Der Hayr and I would exchange plays on words, tongue twisters, and riddles. It was a fairly even exchange. He would give us a chuckle by throwing out, in French, a cute little epigram where three words with the same sound have different meanings:

"La mere du maire est tombe dans la mer." Which translates as "The mother of the mayor is fallen into the sea." And I would rejoin with an Armenian tongue twister that goes:

"Der Hagopin danzin dzaruh,
Kani dzanr danz gah dzaruh?"

("Father Jacob's pear tree,
(How many heavy pears are on it?")

"Der Hagopin danzin dzaruh,

("Father Jacob's pear tree,)

Dasuh dzanr danz gah dzaruh.”

(There are ten heavy pears on it.”)

And he would come right back with a French bon mot that sounded like Greek:

“L’ane a grosse os; coq a petit os; ver n’a pas os.”

“The donkey has a big bone; the rooster has a small bone; the worm has no bone.”

The following day, Sunday, October 5, after breakfast at the hotel, we set out for Edjmiatsin Monastery and the Sardarabad Memorial and Museum. Edjmiatsin Cathedral is the most ancient Christian temple in Armenia, and the Holy See and official residence of the Catholicos of all Armenians. According to tradition, St. Gregory, the Illuminator, saw a vision of the “Only Begotten” descend from heaven and show the spot where the church should be erected. In 303 A.D., two years after Christianity was declared the state religion, the Mother Church of the Holy See was completed. It was rebuilt in the 480s. Through the centuries there have been construction and additions. The main dome was rebuilt in 1627. The interior murals were painted by Nagash Ovnatan in 1720. The church is surrounded by gardens where one can see examples of “khachkars” or cross stones.

We arrived in Edjmiatsin in time to participate in the Holy Badarak, which was about to commence in the Cathedral. Although the Vehapar was not the Celebrant, he did lead a processional into the church at a certain point in the Liturgy. Someone sidled up to me and made his presence known in a discreet manner. It turned out to be Harry Chantikian, from New Jersey, who visits Armenia regularly, and renders material assistance to his fellow Armenians there.

We then moved on to pay tribute to the heroes of the Battle of Sardarabad. The Sardarabad Memorial and Museum ensemble was built in 1968 to mark the victory over Turkey in 1918, which led to the first independent Republic of Armenia. Here we visited the largest ethnographic museum in Armenia, rich with artifacts and memorabilia.

We had our dinner at a restaurant that is better left unnamed. Although the music and musicians that they featured were palatable, the food was not. I would comment on the meager portions, also, except for the fact that, you, dear reader, would ask, “Why would you want more of something you didn’t like?” The tour organizers were quick to assure us that this instance was not the standard they sought in selecting places to eat. Some of our members who later developed gastric problems attributed them to this establishment, even if the problems didn’t develop until days later.

What saved the evening for me was the socializing with Der Hayr and Yeretsgin. We often sat with them during dinner because they were both so interesting to talk to. On this occasion, I turned to Der Diran and said, “My father, who was the son of a kahana (married priest), told me that John the Baptist had eight names, but I remember only four: Hovhannes (John), Mgrdich (Baptist), Garabed (Forerunner), and Yeghia (Elijah, the risen). Do you know the other four?” He replied. “My understanding is that there were seven.” I said, “O.K., I’ll settle for the other three.” He replied, “Give me a little time to search my memory.” And so we left it at that. Two days later, Der Diran came up with

the fifth: Amlorti, short for Amool Vorti (Son of a sterile or barren mother). Two days after that he came up with the sixth: Markareh (Prophet). Another two days and he came up with the seventh: Rahvirah (Guide, Explorer). And so it was complete, or so we thought. However, another two days elapsed when he came up to me and with a twinkle in his eye declared, “There is an eighth: Aztarar (Announcer of the coming Messiah). I exclaimed, “My father was right, after all. There were eight! Thank you, Der Diran. You don’t know what a service you have rendered, not just to me, but to our youth, for I intend to pass on this precious piece of religious folklore, lest it get lost in our modern system of non-education.”

I always welcome the opportunity to arouse the interest of our young people in Armenian matters by informing them that the tulip originally came from Karabagh, and the apricot from Armenia. The name tulip comes from the Persian word *dulband*, for turban, which it resembles, and the scientific name for apricot is *Prunus Armeniaca*, Armenian Prune.

The following day, Monday, October 6, the guests split up, as originally planned. One group went to Karabagh and the other remained in Yerevan. Those who remained visited Khor Virab, the monastery of Noravank, tour of the Areni winery, tour of Jermuk; and the following day visited a cognac factory, and the Parajanov Museum. They then spent the afternoon at leisure and afterwards had dinner at the Nor Dzorabed Restaurant. The following day they made a tour of Lori, lunched at the Anush restaurant in Lori, and visited the Haghabad and Sanahin monasteries. The excursion to that part of Lori reminded Maro Asatoorian of something that took place near there seven years ago.

It seems that back in July 1996, the ARS implemented a plan to bring together children from Armenia and those from other countries in order for them to get better acquainted with each other. There were 100 orphans from different parts of Armenia whose fathers died fighting for Karabagh in the war of liberation. 50 children came from the diaspora, namely Syria, Lebanon, France, Canada, and the U.S.A. They were put up for three weeks at Camp Gougart in Lori near Vanadzor. Maro accompanied them and stayed with them at the camp, keeping an eye on things, inasmuch as she was in charge of the entire operation.

The group of 24 that went to Karabagh, which we joined, left early in the morning with our very capable MENUA Tours guide, Anna Khachiyan, and our dependable bus driver, Lukash Nikoghosyan. We visited Khor Virab, which is the site where Grigor Partev (Gregory the Parthian) later to be known as St Gregory, the Illuminator, was imprisoned by the pagan Armenian King, Trdat for preaching Christianity. Upon his release, Gregory converted the king to Christianity, whereupon Trdat in 301 A.D. declared it to be the religion of the State of Armenia. Note that Christianity wasn’t legalized in Rome until 313 A.D. by the Edict of Milan. Some of the more daring in our party actually descended into the dark pit where Gregory spent 12 years. From this locale, we were able to observe a spectacular view of Mt. Ararat.

We continued the tour to the village of Areni where the famed Areni Winery operates to make wine from the bounty of Armenia’s sun-kissed grapes. Several of our party

purchased cartons of four and six bottles of Areni wine, some to take home, others to use on the way.

Next we visited the monastery of Noravank in the southern part of Armenia. This monastery, a 13th century structure with beautiful cross stones, is considered to be the pulpit of Siunik bishops. The main church of St Karapet was built in 1227. The various figures of relief on the entrance tympanum and the windows on the western façade are interesting from a sculptural and architectural point of view. The focus of the southern section is the two-storied church of Prince Orbelian, completed by Momik, the great sculptor, in 1339. Two console stairs on both sides of the entrance take one inside the church.

We continued on our journey, stopping for lunch at the Khaytank outdoor restaurant, and then on to Shushi, where we stayed at the Shushi Hotel. Dinner at the hotel was highly satisfactory as we were served a delicious dish of dolma. Accommodations at the hotel were very good, as well. The bed quilts were so warm and comfortable that we felt quite at home.

Another instance of getting to know our people better is that involving Sam Hagopian of Texas. I had met Sam (Sahag) many years ago in the company of Arshag and Takoush Tarpinian, but I could not expect him to remember it. So we started from scratch. And it began after I had passed along to the people on the bus what I had been informed concerning the two legends as to how Nakhichevan got its name.

According to Haroutiun Yeghiazarian, *a k a* Fred Randolph, the name of the territory known as Nakhichevan, which in Armenian means: nakh = first, ichevan = resting place, or caravanserai, got its name from two sources, a written history and an oral history. The written history suggests that it was at or near the place where Noah's Ark came to rest. The oral history suggests that it was where Thaddeus and Bartholomew, patron saints of Armenia, fleeing persecution with their Christianized Jewish followers, and traveling to the northeast, came. When they got to Armenia and saw the beautiful mountains and valleys, they stopped their caravan there and settled. They subsequently established a colony to the west and built a city on the shores of a large beautiful lake, and called both Van, a truncation of Ichevan. The justification for the oral version? The Armenian language may not have existed at the time of Noah, but it certainly did exist at the time of Jesus Christ.

Sam, it turns out, is well acquainted with Fred Randolph, but had not heard him expound on this subject. It quickened Sam's interest, and we discussed the subject further, and a lot of other interesting matters, as well. On the subject of names, Sam had the following anecdote to relate:

When Sam was in the U.S. Army, in his late teens, he had a buddy who was a Southern Baptist planning to study for the ministry. He had shown some curiosity about Sam's surname, so Sam told him that Hagopian was the equivalent of Jacobson, Hagop being the Armenian rendering of Yakov, Hebrew for Jacob. Sam went on to tell him that his

first name was actually Sahag, a truncation of Isahag, the Armenian rendering of Yitzhak, Hebrew for Isaac. His friend commented on what he thought was Sam's Jewish background, to which Sam replied, "But I'm not Jewish!" His friend then asked Sam what his father's name was, and Sam said "Movses or Moses," to which his friend rejoined, "Sure, sure, you're not Jewish!"

I, in turn, informed Sam that when Tom Vartabedian, columnist for The Armenian Weekly, asked me what I thought was the most popular Armenian family name, I replied "Hagopian", inasmuch as its English equivalent in the form of Jackson has supplanted Smith and Jones as the most prevalent surname.

Sam's son-in-law, Arman Manoukian, hails from Ontario, Canada. When I asked him if he were acquainted with the writer Ara Baliozian, who resides in Kitchener, he replied in the affirmative. He even suggested that when I next communicate with him, I mention that he, Arman, was the nephew of Sarkis Vartanian with whom Ara went to school in Athens, Greece.

It wasn't until I returned from our tour and was relating elements of the trip to my friend, Armen Babamian, that Armen reminded me that Mary Jamgochian was Sam's sister. Mary (Zepure) and her husband Jam (Vartkes) Jamgochian had been prominent members of our church and community in New Jersey before they moved to Florida. To think that I had to visit Armenia to find out about that relationship. How foreign travel can illuminate domestic matters!

Aren't we Armenians fortunate? Whenever we meet a fellow Armenian, we don't start off as strangers, needing to get to know each other. We already know so much about each other, our history, culture and religion, that we have a magnificent base on which to build. Trivialities are dispensed with, so that we are given the opportunity to forge in-depth relationships that will endure for our entire lives. That is exactly what takes place when a large group of Armenians goes on tour. Those that we didn't know, we got to know well, and those that we already knew, we got to know better. When you conceive of yourself as being part of something greater than your own time and place, you extend your existence back into the past, and forward into the future. Long live the Armenians, wherever they may be!

The following morning, Tuesday, October 7, we had breakfast at the hotel, and set out on an ambitious journey. We toured the city of Shushi; visited the Ghazanchetsots Church, where the Azeri military had stored their arms, which were captured by the Armenians after they scaled the sheer cliffs of Shushi during the war of liberation. According to our Armenian guides, there is an interesting history to the name of this church. It seems that sometime in the middle of the 19th century, Armenians from the village of Shakhkert, in the region of Goght, had to leave their village, and come to live in Shushi. They were famous coppersmiths (ghazanchetsi), or as we say in Western Armenian, kanzanjiner. These people built a beautiful cathedral and called it Soorp Amenaprkich (All Saviors). But very soon the people of Shushi began to call it Ghazanchetsots (of the coppersmiths) church. Notice the combining of Turkish and Armenian words in the construction of the

name. Today, both names are in use for the cathedral. I can relate to this very well because my mother's maiden name was Kazanjian, and her father actually was a kajanji. I have a family heirloom in my possession, a small round vase-like receptacle made of tin that has inscribed on the outside in Armenian, Baidzar, and the year 1914. It was obviously a gift to his granddaughter, who, by the way did not survive the trek through the Syrian desert, following the expulsion from Diarbekr by the Turks of what remained of the family.

Continuing to Tank, the Shushi liberation monument (1993), and the Muslim Mosque (19th century); we then observed a panoramic view of Karin Tak (under stone) village, and made a tour of the city of Stepanakert.

The saddest moment of our tour occurred when we visited the cemetery in Stepanakert where the martyrs who fought for freedom in the war of liberation were buried. The tall gravestones marking each grave were engraved with a photographic image of the young Armenian buried there. Their ages all seemed to be in the twenties; young, handsome, virile men; the cream of our people cut down in their prime. I was reminded of the time during the third year of the war, when our son was in the front lines with our boys, writing dispatches and sending them to the Hairenik press for publication. He returned from there without his Timberline boots, and when I asked him about them, said, "Hairig, if you saw them fighting in their slippers, you too would have given them your shoes." When he returned the following year, half the young men he had befriended the previous year were no longer alive. What a comfort it was to have Der Diran Papazian in our midst to give vent to our grief by delivering a most moving eulogy and prayer. I don't believe there was a dry eye present nor anyone who didn't have a lump in the throat.

Fortunately there followed a visit to the Soseh Mangabardez (Kindergarten) in Stepanakert, which gave us a much-needed feeling of relief and spiritual renewal. Classes were in session and we were permitted to observe the children, each class in its own outdoor enclosure. They went through their routines both as a group and as individuals. It was truly inspiring to see these adorable, well dressed and well behaved little children singing and reciting in the Armenian language what they had been taught by their teachers. In 1998, when the kindergarten was founded, the Cyprus ARS Soseh Chapter-at-Large assumed the financial responsibility for the renovations and furnishings. The ARS, Eastern USA has also contributed funds for the upkeep of the kindergarten, which has approximately 100 pupils, spread among preparatory, senior and junior groups. A large number are on a waiting list. The kindergarten has 12 full time and 2 part time employees. Its director is Nellie Gouljian.

I observed as Antranig Boudakian spoke to the principal. Knowing that there were orphans among them, he asked how many there were. Her answer was: "There are no orphans. These are our and your children." This reply resonated with Antranig as he reflected on his own experience. Born in Aleppo and having lived among an alien though hospitable people until he was ready for school, he has never ceased to feel proud of the ARS and the Prelacy there for having made it possible for him to attend Armenian elementary school.

All the members of our party were so impressed by what they saw and heard, that a spontaneous collection of funds took place on the spot, and for this donation a formal receipt was duly provided.

We next visited Revival Square, the Tombstone of Arthur Mkrtchian, first president of Karabagh, the monument to the legendary freedom fighter Ashot Ghulian, and the Historical Museum of Artsakh. The Stepanakert Bazaar was a sight to behold, with every kind of foodstuffs, fruits and vegetables. Astoundingly, there were great hunks of beef and baskets of fresh fish for sale, none of which was refrigerated. We continued past the “Tatik Papik” statue, symbol of Artsakh, to Gandzasar, where we had a picnic style lunch. Afterwards, we had to change from a bus to two minivans because of the rocky terrain and narrow road, in order to make the trip to the monastery that sits atop the mountain. It took three hours, and was a bit rough on some of our fellow travelers. I know that Sam Hagopian, who had a bad back to begin with, paid for his pleasure by spending a couple of days in bed. The name of Gandzasar didn’t make much sense to me until I rendered it in Western Armenian, when it became clear to me that Kantsasar meant Treasure Mountain. The monastery is located on the peak of the mountain. Looking out from the church one looks down in all directions. The most interesting thing about the church is its caretaker, Der Hovhannes Hovhannesian, a tall handsome married priest with four children, who conducts Badarak every Sunday for the benefit of the children of the surrounding villages, who climb the mountain to attend. His conversation with us was highly inspirational. Would that we had a hundred priests like him. The journey back left us exhausted, but spiritually satisfied. We had our dinner at the Shushi Hotel and retired early. But not before I had the opportunity to pass on the following to Yeretsgin Rosalie, which she just loved:

“Here is something you can try out on your Sunday School teachers: Methuselah, the oldest man mentioned in the Bible, died before his father did. How is that possible? Answer: Enoch, father of Methuselah, is one of two Bible characters who never died. Genesis 5:24 states: ‘And Enoch walked with God; and he was not; for God took him.’ Again, according to Hebrews 11:5, ‘By faith, Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God translated him: for before his translation, he had this testimony, that he had pleased God.’ The other personage who didn’t die was the prophet Elijah. Kings 2:11 says, ‘And it came to pass, as they [Elijah and Elisha] still went on, and talked,, that, behold there appeared a chariot of fire, which parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.’ These two, Yenovk and Yeghia in Armenian, are referred to in the requiem prayer *Ee verin Yerusaghem*, rendered in English, thus: In heavenly Jerusalem, in the abode of the angels, / Where Enoch and Elijah grow old in dove-like innocence, / Worthily resplendent in the paradise of Eden, / Merciful Lord, have mercy on the souls of our departed.”

Alice and I had decided beforehand to make the side trip to Karabagh, and not knowing what to expect in the way of accommodations both in Karabagh and Armenia, we had

packed two rolls of toilet tissue, with the core removed, and flattened out. It turned out that we had no need for them, so we left them at the Hotel Shushi.

Upon our departure, the manager of the Shushi Hotel, Vachik Zakarian, who had fought in the Karabagh war of independence, and had been injured by a land mine, and who, incidentally, was a member of the Central Committee of the ARF, took me aside and asked, “Are you in accord with the path your son is following?” I replied, “The only thing I am not in accord with is the fact that he is as yet not married and has no children to add to the well-being of our people.” Vachig smiled and said, “Don’t worry, we will find a nice Karabaghtsi girl for him.”

The following morning, Wednesday, October 8, we breakfasted at the hotel and checked out, heading for Jermuk back in Armenia.

At one of our stops in the Lachin corridor separating Karabagh from Armenia, I noticed a sign that read Aghavno Ked (Dove’s River). This reminded me of my wife whose Armenian name is Aghavni, and the manner by which she came to be given the English name of Alice. When she was ready to enter elementary school, her mother knew that if she registered her daughter as Aghavni, she would have problems with the teachers and students. So she recalled that in her native Sepastia, there was an Alis Ked (Alis River). So she registered Aghavni as Alice. And here we are making full circle with Aghavno Ked.

Afterwards we visited the Jermuk resort, famous for its hot mineral springs. People with illness flock to these spring waters for their curative and healing qualities. Others enjoy the spa town for the rest, relaxation, and spectacular scenery it offers. Lush alpine vegetation, forests, and the Tsolk waterfall surround the hill upon which the town is located. From here we returned to Yerevan and had the afternoon free to explore the city and do some souvenir hunting.

We rejoined the other group for dinner at the Ararat Restaurant in Yerevan.

On Thursday, October 9, we had breakfast at the hotel and departed at 10 a.m. for a three day visit to Sevan. Our first stop was at Dilijan, which is famous for its forests and health resorts, its spectacular scenery and cultural centers. We drove through a plush forest to reach the Haghartsin Monastery, an 11th-13th century church situated deep in the woods, about 18 km from the town of Dilijan, and a 15 minute walk to reach it. I reflected back on my youthful reading, seeming to remember a book titled Ararat by Elgin Groseclose, wherein Dilijan figured prominently. We had lunch at the Getap Restaurant, after which we visited the Folk Art Museum of Dilijan. I wondered about the name Dilijan. I knew that *dil* in Turkish is tongue, or language, and *jan* in Turkish derived from Persian is soul. Put together it could mean: soul of the tongue or language. Then again, *dil* in Persian is heart, so, with both parts from Persian, dilijan could mean heart’s soul.

We continued to Sevan, where bus #1 went to Harsnaqar, and bus #2 went to Avan Marak Tsapatagh, both hotels being located at opposite ends of Lake Sevan. After checking into the hotels, our group in Harsnaqar left the hotel to join the other group at Avan Marak for dinner. We stayed overnight at Sevan in our respective hotels.

The following morning, Friday, October 10, I awoke at 8 a.m. and perceived that the sun was about to rise over Lake Sevan. I wanted to get a photograph of the lake with the sun just about to rise over it, but it wasn't time yet, so I went into the bathroom to shave intending to return in time to get the picture. Alas, I was too late. The sun had already risen and the sun was bright as could be above the horizon. It wasn't possible to get a photograph that would be worth anything. I vowed to get it right the next morning. We had breakfast at the hotel and then a free morning, which we spent walking around inhaling the clear, clean, fresh air, and talking to the townsfolk.

Antranig Boudakian and I politely addressed three young girls passing by on their way to work. We wanted to know if they were happy in our homeland, especially in beautiful Sevan. We received some mixed answers, but one of the three remained a bit to discuss the matter further. She voiced complaints about government officials, and desired to leave Armenia. Antranig reminded her that three quarters of the people in the world are struggling with a standard of living below that of Armenia, and for her own sake and that of her country she should remain. She acknowledged the validity of his reasoning and assured us that she would consider the prospects of staying.

Both groups moved to the peninsula that juts out into Lake Sevan, and on which sit the churches of Lake Sevan. That portion of the peninsula was once an island, but the need for irrigation had lowered the level of the lake so that the island rose to join with the shore, thus forming a land bridge. Subsequent actions have been taken to restore some of the lake's former level by diverting the waters of the Arpa River into the lake. This lake, one of the largest and highest lakes in Eurasia, sits 1900 meters above sea level and is the body of water wherein dwells the famous Ishkhanatsoug (Prince fish), so called because of the markings on the top of its head in the shape of a crown. Sevan is no longer the sole abode of that species as steps have been taken by the government to stock it in other waters of Armenia.

The weather was as fair as it could be during our entire stay in Armenia and Karabagh, but the best of all was reserved for us during the boat ride on Lake Sevan. Some of us even got a bit of a tan on our faces from the bright sunshine. The blue skies of Armenia reminded me of those of Wyoming. The wine and cheese party aboard the boat engendered warm conviviality among us, and some of our members brought along bottles of wine that they had purchased at the Areni Winery that we had visited previously, and shared it with us. Before we disembarked, I took one of those empty bottles of Areni and stuck it in my jacket pocket. After we had gone ashore, I walked to the water's edge and washed the bottle gently in the ripples of the water as it lapped the shore, and eventually was able, with the help of Lake Sevan, to remove the label from the bottle. It was such a beautifully crafted label that I knew I must preserve it for my nephew Raffi Hamparian whose first-born daughter is named Areni.

Some members of our party climbed up to the St. Karapet and St. Arakelots monasteries that sat atop what was formerly the island in the lake.

Both groups returned to the Hotel in Harsnaqar. During and following dinner, when the professional musicians weren't performing, and our people weren't dancing to the music, other members of our group, some of whom are used to making fools of themselves, put on a talent show for all to enjoy. The Dadoyan girls, as I call them, (Hourig & Sossie), together with Barbara Haroutunian, and Anahid Sarkisian from California, engaged in a skit that involved a crazy lady who has been convicted of killing her husband and now appears in court for sentencing. To the judge's questions, translated from English to Armenian, she responds with songs, as follows:

Judge(Barbara/Anahid): What is your name?

Crazy lady(Hourig, with Sossie hidden behind her gesticulating wildly): Nune!.. Nune! Nune!

Judge: Nune, what is your age?

Crazy lady: I am sixteen, going on seventeen.

Judge: What is your occupation?

Crazy lady: Goshgagar em. Goshignerut guh shidgem, (I am a shoemaker. I fix your shoes.)

Judge: Where do you live?

Crazy lady: Yerevan, Yerevan im siradz otevan. (Yerevan, Yerevan, my beloved lodge.)

Judge: What is your husband's name?

Crazy lady: Nubari boye tizouge, atchkere noush ou khoumare. (Nubar's stature is short; his eyes are almond-shaped and squinted.

Judge: Where did you meet your husband?

Crazy lady: Khundzori dzari dagin. (Under the apple tree.)

Judge: What is your political belief?

Crazy lady: Ariunod trosh veh Tashnagsutian. (Bloody flag of the majestic ARF)

Judge: Why did you kill your husband?

Crazy lady: Seres kaghdni togh mena. (Let my love be a secret.)

Judge: I sentence you to be exiled from Armenia to Turkey.

Crazy lady(coming to her senses): No,no, not Turkey!

Der Diran sang quatrains from the famous Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. Yeretsgin Rosalie narrated one of St. Peter's moral teachings. Nevarte Tikoyan also sang. Barbara Haroutunian and Antranig Boudakian told some funny stories, and Zohrab Tazian performed his vigorous singing and dancing as usual.

The next item on the program requires some background explanation. It represents an example of the way we entertained ourselves on the bus while on the road. Based on a chance remark Barabara Haroutunian made when on the way to Dilijan I offhandedly sang a single line "On the Road to Dilijan" to the tune "On the Road to Mandalay." Before you knew it three more lines appeared to make the first verse to our song. As we continued our tour other verses appeared and finally a refrain. We decided to rehearse

and perform it at the first opportunity, and this was it. The song was performed with the participation of many of the passengers on Bus #1. It won't make the charts, but to us it was a living expression of our sentiments codified on the spot in the homeland. Here's how it goes:

1st verse:

On the road to Dilijan,
With our good friend, Mirijan;
Where the lemons are like melons
All the way to Lake Sevan.

2nd verse:

On the road to Lake Sevan,
Which is near to Dilijan,
We will fish for little Ishkhan
In the waters of Sevan.

3rd verse

On the road to Harsnaqar,
Which from Sevan isn't far,
We will pay a special tribute
To the rock of Aghtamar.

4th verse:

On the road to Karabagh,
We will dance a little khagh,
And remember our Shushi
As the bravest little tagh.

Refrain:

On the road to Hayasdan,
Which to us is Mayragan,
We will keep the faith forever
With our brothers Haygagan.

The refrain, of course, is sung after each verse.

The other group returned to their hotel in Avan Marak to retire for the night.

The following morning, Saturday, October 11, the group from Avan Marak came to Harsnaqar and both groups together drove to Tsaghkadzor (Valley of Flowers), a mountain resort located on the eastern slope of the Teghenis mountain, 52 km north of Yerevan. There is a ski lift operating in season which leads to the top of the mountain. Tzaghkadzor is a small resort town, famous for its sports complex, equipped with various sports facilities. We visited the town's Kecharis monastery, a religious and cultural center of medieval Armenia built in the period from the 11th to 13th centuries, and comprised of

three chapels. The domed hall of St. Gregory, the ensemble's most ancient structure, dates back to 1003 A.D. Another structure is the small chapel of Holy Cross, and next to it stands the church of Katoghike, a 13th century building.

Along the way we passed an area where the mountainside sparkled as though studded with diamonds. Our bus stopped to permit the passengers, who wished to do so, to inspect the hillsides and collect some souvenirs. There were pieces of volcanic obsidian, black and shiny, all over the place. Many of us collected pieces of them to take back with us. I had the advantage of being in possession of a plastic bag in which I was able to carry some twelve to fifteen pieces, both large and small. Later I was to discover that the other bus did not stop as ours did. So I gave half of my collection to one of the passengers on the other bus to distribute to members of his group. Ain't I a nice guy? Frankly, what was I going to do with so much dead weight on the trip home? As it was I had problems with the heavy jar of cherry preserves that our son gave me to take back.

We then returned to our hotel in Yerevan. But the rooms were not ready. The Spanish soccer team was in town to play a qualifying round with the Armenian team. But the Spanish team hadn't checked out of the hotel at the customary time which caused the people at the hotel desk to keep us waiting for an inordinate time, which didn't exactly endear us to them, considering how tired we all were after the ride back from Sevan. We found out later that government officials at the highest level had requested the management of the hotel to make this allowance for security reasons. They didn't want the Spaniards to arrive at the soccer stadium too soon before the game. Those of us who did not attend the soccer game had dinner at the Ashtarak Dzor, a huge outdoor facility with a backdrop of a sailing vessel outlined in lights, a restaurant that featured live music, dancing, a poor view of the entertainment, and cold food. The best part was watching women baking lavash in a tonir. We returned to the hotel, happy to be able to retire for the evening.

The next day, Sunday, October 12 was a free day for those of us who chose not to visit the ruins of Ani. Alice and I put the day to good use.

About a quarter mile from Hotel Armenia in Yerevan is an area that stretches for another quarter mile, which is referred to as the Vernisage, an open air flea market that operates only on Saturdays and Sundays. *Vernissage*, in my French dictionary is defined as varnishing, or varnishing day. It is described in brochures as an arts and crafts fair, but in addition, one can find all sorts of unexpected items for sale, such as: machinery, electronic parts, copper wires, fixtures, household items, or anything that may be salable. Many artists display their work, some good, some not. Lots of small jewelry, bracelets, rings, necklaces and such. Good source of souvenirs for the folks back home.

A number of book vendors had stalls or open areas to display their offerings. I asked a few, as we passed, if they had a Turkish-Armenian dictionary. One after another said, "No," until I came to one who said, "My brother has one at home. Wait here and I'll go get it." I told him to forget it. I later found what I was looking for at the Noyan Tapan Bookstore just around the corner from the Hotel Armenia.

My interest was aroused by a stall, really a table in the open, that featured tavli boards and checkers and dice. Some of the boards were nicely handcrafted, but too big to bring back comfortably, so I concentrated on the checkers and the dice. Speaking in Armenian, the vendor and I had no problem in communication. Those checkers that were handcrafted were priced beyond what I was prepared to pay, so I concentrated on the dice. Two pairs of dice, which appeared to be carved from a greenish colored stone, struck my fancy. I asked to see a pair. He handed me two from the four that were together, and I asked him if they were Armenian dice. He replied in the affirmative. "These dice are made from volcanic stone found right here in Armenia." I replied, "I have no doubt that what you say is true, but I mean something quite different when I ask if they are Armenian dice." He looked puzzled, so I proceeded to elaborate. "My father taught me how to distinguish Armenian dice, which are hand made, from non-Armenian dice which are machine made. Armenian dice come in pairs. By that I mean that there is a left die and a right die. This is accomplished by the sequencing of the numbering on each die. If you place the dice on a flat surface with the single dot signifying the number one on top, and observe where the numbers two and three fall, you will see that the number two is on the right on one die and on the left on the other die. The number three is the reverse also. Machined dice are uniform in the sequencing. Thus when you take them in hand and arrange them so that the numbers match all around, the inside numbers are the same, as are the ends with Armenian dice. Not so with non-Armenian dice. The vendor looked at me in wonder. Never had he heard anything of the sort. I explained to him that it is purely a matter of philosophy. To the Armenian mind, everything comes in pairs, left and right: hands, feet, eyes, etc. So why not dice? I then conducted a test on the dice he had handed me. They did not pass muster, and I told him so. I then had a second thought. "Let me see the other pair just like this one." He handed them to me. After a brief examination, I looked at him slyly and said, "These are indeed Armenian dice. You merely handed me the wrongly matched pair" I substituted one from the original pair with one from the second pair and both sets now were comprised of a left and a right die.

I said to the vendor, whose name is Arshak, "Let this be a small folklore cultural contribution to the Homeland from the Diaspora." He grinned warmly. And to my satisfaction, I made the purchase. I asked him if he had to pay for the space he occupied in the marketplace. "Yes, of course," he said. "And I suppose the money ends up in some individual's pocket." "What else?" he replied. Some time later, one of our members, perhaps Antranig Boudakian, stated that these fees were recently increased 300%. But when I ran this by Jerair, he said, "You're talking about, perhaps 500 Drams a day, which is equivalent to about a U.S. Dollar. No big deal."

After we returned to the hotel to drop off our purchases, clean up and change our clothes, we looked around to see if there were anyone from our group who might be interested in going to the Dolmama Restaurant for dinner. Not succeeding in attracting anyone, Alice and I decided to go on our own. It was only a few blocks away from the hotel on Pushkin Street off Abovian. It was a very neat place, comprised of four rooms, one of which was outdoors. Tastefully furnished with a few art works adorning the walls, and best of all, large luxurious cloth napkins. I had grown tired of the paper ones most restaurants

provided. The menu contained relatively few items, compared to those of the Greek diners back home, menus which take all day to read. The prices were what you would expect from a good restaurant. We decided to sample more than an entrée, so we ordered lentil soup, which contained a spinach-like green that, we were told, grows wild in Armenia. The lentils were mashed up beyond recognition, but that only tended to enhance the taste and consistency of the broth. And what's more it was piping hot, just the way it ought to be. Remember, cold soup (bagh about), is the term we Armenians use to describe a person without any personality,

From the list of appetizers we chose a platter of antipasto, prosciutto accompanied with what looked like sliced peaches and parsley and another delicate green. Very tasty. Even better than one gets in an Italian restaurant. Now for the entrée. Alice ordered stuffed grape leaves (there were seven of them.) with madzoon. I ordered the mixed dolma: pepper, tomato, eggplant and squash. Nice and hot, and what's more, the gravy had summac in it to give it a little tartness. Just what we Dikranagerdtsis are used to. The large warm rolls were just perfect to dip into the gravy, which we call jinj, not choor, as non-Dikranagerdtsis do. We hadn't ordered wine, which was on the menu, but when Jerair showed up, with his lovely wife, Aida, soon after we had entered the restaurant, he bestowed on us a complimentary bottle of his private stock of pomegranate wine. Delizioso!

Our waiter was a pleasant and efficient young man named Varsham. When I asked him the meaning of his name, he wasn't sure, but he thought it meant lion heart. It turned out to be from the Babylonian Parsam, meaning master, lord.

When we returned to the hotel, more stuffed than the dolma, we told everyone we met about the place, and encouraged them to try it.

That night, most of our people planned to attend the Armenian Philharmonic concert featuring music from Aram Khatchaturian's ballet Spartacus, but we decided to pass on it and hang around Republic Square to observe the festivities marking the 2,785th anniversary of the founding of Yerevan. And we were glad we decided to take it in. The square was closed to traffic well in advance. People began to congregate in the square. What a wonderful sight it was to see families, mothers and fathers with their well-dressed and well-behaved children, walking hand in hand to witness the celebration, not to mention the slim, trim, pretty girls of Yerevan. All about us we heard Armenian being spoken. The sound of music and dancing by various groups filled the air. You could tell that the Yerevantsis possessed a good deal of civic pride, and weren't afraid to express it in public.

Some time later, I asked Der Diran if there were any connection between the name of Yerevan and the words, yerevan hanel (bring to light), yerevan hanvil (come to light), and yerevnal (to appear). He replied,

“Armenia came into being over the ruins of Urartu, when the Urartians were subjugated by the new rulers, namely the Armenians. The city of Yerevan was built on the ruins of

Erebuni and the new city was called Erevan. Armenian philologists and linguists confirm that the name Yerevan was derived from the name of Erebuni on the basis of pronunciation and sounding of the name.

However, traditionally, the origin of the name of Yerevan has long been attributed to a legend of Noah's Ark preserved by Armenian historians. Accordingly, it is said that after the deluge when Noah's Ark descended upon the mountains of Ararat, and Noah saw land for the first time, he exclaimed, 'Yerevatz' literally meaning 'it has appeared,' meaning that the land has been seen, from which is derived the name of Yerevan."

To which I added the observation that on the old maps, the city was spelled Erivan, and he remarked that the name of the capital city of Armenia has several different spellings.

The next day, Monday, October 13, after breakfast, we departed for Mt. Aragats to visit the Byurakan Observatory, and the Amberd fortress and church nearby. The Byurakan Astrophysical Observatory was founded in 1946 by the noted scientist, Victor Hambartsumian. We were given a tour of the facilities along with an informative lecture on what is acknowledged to be one of the most famous observatories of the European and Asian continents. The ruins of the Amberd fortress were difficult to get to, and more so the church. We had to follow a mountain trail of stone and gravel first down and then back up to get to the church, which was built on a rocky promontory in the 10th-13th centuries. I must confess to slipping on the gravel and falling down, but was able to roll with the fall and avoid bruises, something I learned from my youthful days.

We visited so many monasteries and churches that had magnificent acoustic properties, that Der Diran and I would test them out with some bits of sharagans sung very softly. It was in this tiny chapel on top of the mountain where we experienced the most spiritual feeling as we sang together the hymn of vesting, Khorhourt Khorin (thought of thoughts, or, mystery of mysteries). Our liturgy's eloquence is to be found in its music, so that, even if one doesn't understand classical Armenian, one can derive its spiritual benefits just by listening to the music. And that is my answer to those who think the Badarak should be performed in English. Rather than dragging a work of art down to their level, they should aspire to reach its ennobling spiritual level.

We returned to Yerevan and had dinner at the Arma Restaurant, located in the hills, and with a beautiful view. But, as usual, the music was too loud.

On Tuesday, October 14, we were scheduled to visit the Armenian Parliament, the American University of Armenia, and the American Embassy of Armenia. However, my wife and I declined to go in order to relax and take in some exhibits and museums. While sitting at a table outside the hotel in the Meeting Point Café, enjoying a cup of coffee, who do we see strolling by but Haikaz Grigorian, our psychiatrist friend from back home in New Jersey, who spends some time every year in Armenia and Karabagh ministering to the emotional needs of his fellow Armenians.

We planned to visit the Aivazovsky paintings exhibit in the National Art Gallery across Republic Square, but when we went there we were disappointed to find that it was closed for the time being. Apparently those in charge decide when they will be open and when not. We decided to go on to the next place we planned to visit, the Yervand Kochar museum. We thought it was a short distance away, so we began to walk. Along the way we met my cousins Hourig & Sossie and their friend, Anahid, an Armenian resident they had befriended at a relative's wedding, and talked them into accompanying us to the museum.

We were charged a nominal amount for a tour and lecture, which was very comprehensive and interesting. Some of his early paintings from the 1920s seemed to evoke the style of Pablo Picasso. I was struck by the similarity of the features of a female subject of one of Kochar's paintings to those of Anahid Dinkjian, who is the daughter of the singer Onnik Dinkjian. I commented to the curator that it was too bad that one could not photograph articles in the exhibit, as I would have liked to take a photo of that work back with me. She advised me that they sold packets of prints of what was on exhibit, and that this painting, PORTRAIT OF ARPENIK, was among them. I, of course, didn't hesitate to purchase them. There were three packets, paintings, sculptures, and graphic works, and all for a couple of dollars.

We had planned to take in the Sarian and Parajanov museums, as well. But we were getting tired and returned to the hotel. Those members of our party who did not go to Karabagh were given a tour of the Parajanov museum during the time that they remained in Yerevan. So we missed out on that one.

That evening we dined at the Old Yerevan restaurant. The music was loud as usual, but the lead singer possessed an excellent quality of voice, and moreover sang without a microphone. Among the invited guests were some ARF officials of the National Government, who were introduced to us, and who took turns addressing the gathering. Among them were:

The Hon. Vahan Hovhannissian, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly
The Hon. Levon Mkrtchian, Chairman of the ARF faction of the National Assembly
The Hon. Armen Rustamian, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the National Assembly

Mr. Vazrig Bedrossian, Member of the Kerakooyin Marmin (Supreme Body) of the ARF in Armenia, who was our liaison contact.

In welcoming us to Armenia, they were impressed by our group and its interest in the advancement of Armenia. They wanted all to know that the ARF was working within the framework of this government to solve some of the major problems, such as government/business corruption. They wanted to assure our people that even though the ARF is part of the present government coalition, they have not abandoned the principle of government based on justice. As an example, The Hon. Levon Mkrtchian is Chairman

of the Anti-Corruption Commission of the Armenian National Assembly because of the sponsorship by the ARF of this type of action.

They invited us back, and hoped that we witnessed the improvements to Armenia. They said that this was Our Armenia just as much as it was theirs. There is no separation between the Armenians of the Diaspora and the Armenians living on the land. This is the ARF philosophy. They hope it will be the first of many more visits to Armenia as they are prepared to help make our journey to the homeland a rewarding one. We, of course, were delighted to hear this kind of talk. It is to be hoped that their actions will match their words.

One drawback to the décor of the restaurant was the extremely tall chairs that we were given to sit on, and which were arranged on each side of long tables so that we had difficulty seeing the musicians and the speakers. Even the waiters had trouble squeezing in between the chairs when trying to service customers.

On Wednesday, October 15, we departed from “*Varnots*” Airport in Yerevan. Upon our arrival in Vienna, one of the members of our party confided to me that she had been shaken down by a female customs official when leaving the Yerevan airport. It seems she had purchased a bottle of liquor from the Mekhitarists in Vienna upon our arrival there, and still had it in her possession when leaving Armenia, as she intended to take it home with her. She was informed that she would have to pay to take it out of Armenia. When she asked how much, the customs officer told her she could give whatever she desired, but she had to pay something. This should have alerted her to something shady, but, being intimidated, she gave her five dollars, which seemed to disappoint her, but she took it and let the traveler through. I, of course, being the quick-witted individual that I am (when I'm not involved) told her she should have asked for a receipt. That would have stopped her cold in her tracks. She replied, “Why didn't I think of that?” Checking it out afterwards, I determined that she was well within the limits of what amount of liquor she was permitted to bring in and take out of Armenia without paying duty fees.

We arrived in Vienna just in time to find out that Austrian Airlines employees were on strike. It seems the company proposed reducing employees' salaries in order to make the airline more competitive, but the salaries of the top brass were to remain untouched. If the reports were true, the employees had my sympathy. But that didn't help our situation any. Our tour leader, Faye Weissblum, checked out the situation with the airline and advised those of us who were bound for New York, that we would be put up at a hotel for the night and scheduled for a flight out the next day. She gave us instructions to meet at the Austrian Airline counter to obtain the proper authorization. My guess is that my wife and I probably lagged behind, because by the time we got to the counter none of our party was in sight. We dutifully got on line, waited about an hour, and being treated as individuals instead of a group, were given the option of flying to Paris, and then New York. Being tired and wanting to get home, we accepted. On the way home I kept thinking of Mary Sarajian's assurances concerning Austrian Airlines, and concluded that she was right; they did make good on their obligation to serve us as efficiently as circumstances allowed.

In Armenia, three things you could count on were dogs barking in the night, and flies and beggars pestering you during the day. I don't know what can be done about the dogs and flies, but the beggars can be ignored for the most part without pangs of conscience bothering one. My friend Jerair tells me that most of them are professionals; and if they parade around with a small child, it probably isn't even theirs. I told Jerair the story about the tourist who obtained the confidence of one of these beggars, and asked him to tell him frankly how much he earned in a year. When he heard the answer, he exclaimed, "Why, I am a physician, and I don't make that much," to which the beggar replied, "I know; I didn't do as well when I was a physician." Jerair commented, "There's a lot of truth to that." In both Yerevan and Stepanakert, when local inhabitants were questioned about those people who seem to have nothing to do, the response was, "Some of them are too lazy to work at what they feel is unrewarding labor. They are content to cultivate a plot of land and that is sufficient for their material needs. These same people refuse to care for their dwellings, letting broken windows and leaky roofs go unattended. And these are the same people who cut down the trees for firewood during the severe winter of 1992."

But, of course, there is poverty and hard times, especially for orphaned children, or those who have only one parent who is too busy seeking a livelihood to properly care for them. One of our Armenian Churches Senior Citizens, John Vaniskhian, had given me some cash to give to the directress of the Orran Benevolent Center in Yerevan, which operates a soup kitchen for orphaned children, not far from the Hotel Armenia,. He had given me instructions on how to get there, but it took me three tries to eventually find it, as there is no sign or street number on the structure in which it is housed to identify it. When we did finally go there, we found some children playing inside and a young fellow and a young girl who asked us into the office where there was a desk with a computer and printer. I gave her the money, but she asked us to sit down while she made out a receipt and letter of thanks. When she asked for the donor's address, and I could not give it to her, she asked me for mine. I was so impressed with such a commitment to proper accountability that I made a like contribution upon our return home. It seems contributions by donors will enable them to move to somewhat better quarters, and which will be more properly identified and easily found.

Not that I didn't have my own personal trials and tribulations, such as, being awakened in the night by barking dogs, having to eat hastily to prevent those pesky Armenian flies from spending too much time squatting on my food, and the ubiquitous beggars. The dogs and the beggars I can cope with, but those infernal flies! I found myself singing, to the tune of Armenian Hoghuh,

Armenian janjuh,
Anarag janjuh,
Pezevang janjuh,
Haygagan janjuh.

I think the Armenian Parliament ought to put the problem of the Armenian fly at the top of their legislative agenda.

There is no denying the fact that living conditions of the people in general is hard. Jobs are scarce, probably because would-be entrepreneurs are reluctant to invest in anything as a result of governmental revenue policy, which taxes a business whether or not the proprietor makes a profit. And if he does make a profit, there are additional taxes to be paid. Apartment houses go unimproved because the public is responsible for its maintenance, not the government, as in former times, despite the fact that there are no real estate taxes. There are a good number of people who actually look back with regret on the Soviet era when everyone had a job. I suppose they got used to the existence of the ruble stores versus the dollar stores, where the ruble stores, which most of them could afford to shop at, had little to offer, and that, inferior to the ample stocks of better grade merchandise that the dollar stores offered. One wonders if the burgeoning tourist trade will bring the people into contact with other values that may restore the moral tone of pre-Soviet times, and reintroduce a healthy middle class.

Although the exodus of Armenians, especially of the professional class, has hurt the country, the fact remains that it is the ones who have remained who will build the country, if it succeeds, and not those who left. As usual, the average Armenian hopes for the best, but is prepared for the worst. I would like to see the Government of Armenia in cooperation with diasporan organizations enlarge established programs to subsidize the travel of young Armenians from other countries to visit Armenia and interact with the population. And young Armenians who are possessed with the pioneering spirit are fortunate to have the opportunity to put that spirit to work in Artsakh, the Armenian name for Karabagh.

Following our return, a number of people have asked me if I thought there was hope for Armenia's economic future. My reply is as follows:

When one reflects on conditions in Armenia and those in its hostile neighbors, Turkey and Azerbaijan, certain matters come into focus. Armenia is a landlocked country and suffering under a blockade imposed by those countries. Yet, Turkey with its vast coastline on the Black and Mediterranean seas, and agricultural and mineral resources, and Azerbaijan, with its significantly large coastline on the Caspian sea, and tremendous oil reserves, are no match for Armenia when it comes to the drive and energy of their respective peoples. Where Armenians go, the seeds of prosperity travel with them! Therefore, in my judgment, not only will the country forge ahead economically, but I worry about future overdevelopment and degradation of Armenia's beautiful environment.

My good friend Charles (Khoren) Apkarian, whom I see twice a week at our several Armenian Church Senior Citizen gatherings in New Jersey, asked me what the highlight of our trip was. I replied that for me there were two highlights: one was the culinary delight of dining at Dolmama Restaurant in Yerevan, and the other was a continuing one of interacting with my fellow tourists in an entirely Armenian environment. Yes, there were sights to see, things to do and people to meet. But the ability to recreate an Armenian social, cultural milieu by bringing the diaspora to the homeland was without a doubt the most inspiring aspect of the tour for me.

Postscript: It was only after we had returned home that my wife and I simultaneously discovered that visiting Armenia and Karabagh had so diverted us that we had completely forgotten about our wedding anniversary which occurred on October 14, when we were still in Yerevan. We laughed it off by my wife buying me a new electric shaver, and my buying her a bouquet of flowers. As Shakespeare wrote, “ALL’S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.”

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